

- “Now the God of Peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to who be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” (Hebrews 13:20,21) In his closing remarks, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews expresses his desire for the letter's recipients to continue on in their walk of faith in such a way that they would be fulfilling the will of God and be working in that which was pleasing in His sight. I feel confident in saying that this would have been his desire for all those within the family of Christ. He would desire for all Christians to walk according to God's will and to do only that which is pleasing in His sight. Yet, there remains this question concerning this desire of the Hebrew writer...How are we to know God's will?
- Some would say that we come to know God's will the same way as the writers of Scripture. God directly revealed to them His will as we read in **II Peter 2:20,21**. Their ability to know God's will was one of miraculous means. With that type of revelation not available to us, today, how then are we to know what God would have for us to do as His people as individuals and as His people as churches? The vast majority of people would say that we just need to read the Bible to come to know God's will. I would certainly agree with them that going to the Bible is the correct answer, but that still leaves us with some questions about how to go about looking to the Bible for answers about God's will.
- I believe a good way to answer this question would be to approach it from a case study point of view. Going through school, I'm sure we all remember having to examine case studies to see how others responded to a certain situation, and then give the lessons and principles that we learned from that particular instance. We want to do the same thing this morning. We want to be able to determine God's will for us, and we want to learn how to do that by examining the happenings of **Acts 15**. The Apostles were faced with a serious issue, and we want to see how they went about answering the important question laid before them.

The Question: Did God desire for the Gentiles to be saved, and how were they to be saved?

- A. In **Acts 14:26-28**, we find Paul and Barnabas back with the Christians in Antioch as they are telling them of the many great things that had been done throughout their journeys.
 - B. Beginning in **Acts 15:1,2**, we see some Jews coming from Judea and trying to hold the Christians in Antioch to the Law of Moses in order for them to be considered saved. Obviously, this was greatly disturbing to these Gentiles and after much debate, they sent Paul, Barnabas, and some others to Jerusalem to discuss this important matter with the rest of the Apostles and the shepherds of the church there.
 - C. Upon their arrival, they were met with some of the believing Pharisees who were adamant that the Gentiles should be required to be circumcised and to keep the Law of Moses in order to stand rightly before God.
 - D. The rest of the chapter leads us through how the Apostles determined God's will for the Gentiles concerning their salvation in Jesus Christ and/or the Law of Moses.
- I. **Peter: Was forced to conclude God's Will for the Gentiles based upon the happenings of Cornelius's house in Acts 10. (vv.7-11)**
 - A. Back in **Acts 10**, we see Peter dealing with the first recorded Gentile converts.
 1. Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian military, who feared God and prayed continually was approached in a vision by an angel of God. The angel told him to send for Peter, and Cornelius obeys and does so. **(vv.1-6)**
 2. Peter, likewise, has a vision. In fact, he has 3 visions that repeatedly tell him that God has cleansed that which is unholy and now it is lawful and holy. His vision is regarding food, but we'll see how this plays into his determining of God's will. **(vv.9-16)**
 3. Cornelius's men arrive to where Peter is staying and He is prompted by the Spirit to go with these men. **(vv.19-23)**
 4. Upon coming to Cornelius, they explain their experiences and Peter teaches them of Jesus Christ and what had been done through Him. **(vv.24-43)**
 5. While Peter was speaking these things of Jesus, the Spirit came upon the Gentiles of Cornelius's house. Peter put the pieces of what had happened together and came to the conclusion that these men were now subjects of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. **(vv.44-48)**
 - B. Peter was forced based upon the evidence of what had been happening to come to the conclusion that God now desired for the Gentiles to be obedient to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
 1. Peter was able to connect the dots from his vision to the Spirit's prompting and to the Spirit's power upon the Gentiles to recognize God's will for them to be saved.
 2. His words in **Acts 10:47** are especially telling. He basically asked, "How can anyone think that they are not ready for Jesus when they are experiencing the exact same thing as we (the Apostles) did at the beginning of all of this?"

3. He even says that exact thing in **Acts 11:15-18** as he is relaying this happening to some other Jews in Jerusalem who were upset with his dealings with the Gentiles.
4. He repeats the same thing a second time in **Acts 15:8,9**. Peter examined the evidence and came to the necessary conclusion.

II. Paul & Barnabas: Knew God approved of their teaching the Gentiles by the miracles God gave them the power to perform in **Acts 14**. (v.12)

- A. Paul and Barnabas had posted up in the synagogue of Iconium teaching both Jews and Gentiles the Gospel. (**Acts 14:1-3**)
 1. They were speaking in such a manner that a large number of people believe and obeyed. Both Jews and Gentiles were included in the number of the believing. (v.1)
 2. They ran into some issues with the disbelieving Jews. They did everything they could to set the people against Paul and Barnabas. (v.2)
 3. This caused Paul and Barnabas to really dig in their heels and speak even more boldly for the Lord. (v.3)
 4. The Lord was certainly on their side, and He showed His approval of what they were doing by giving them the power to perform miracles that would also work as a confirming agent of their message. (v.3)
- B. Paul and Barnabas point back to this occasion as an example of Jesus's approval of the Gentiles being taught the Gospel. (**Acts 15:12**)
 1. If God had not approved of them teaching the Gentiles about Christ, then why would He have given them the power to work miracles that would persuade further obedience? That just is not logical.
 2. Their point was very simple. They knew that the Gentiles could be saved because the Lord had given them as an approved example of them being taught the Gospel.

III. James: Knew God's desire for the Gentile's salvation based upon God's explicit statements concerning their salvation in the Old Testament. (vv.13-21)

- A. James then takes the floor and recounts for those present the inspired words of **Amos 9:11,12**.
 1. James quotes the writing of Amos to make the point that God had already said what His desires was for the Gentiles. He desired for all nations/Gentiles to be called by His name. (vv.16,17)
 2. He makes the point that these things have been know since a long time ago. (v.18)
 3. To James, it was very clear what God desired on the matter simply by reading what had already been written concerning the subject.
- B. James simply took the words inspired by God and used them to answer the question that had been presented concerning the Gentiles and salvation.
 1. Based upon the writings, James stated clearly that the Gentiles should not be troubled with further regulations for salvation.
 2. They were to hold to the same salvation as the Jews, and all were to be united under head and that was Christ.

The Conclusion: The Holy Spirit desired for the Gentiles the same salvation as the Jews. (vv.23-29)

- A. After the discussion and the words from the Apostles, they along with the shepherds and the whole church sent a letter back to Antioch by the hands of Paul, Barnabas, and others.
- B. This letter stated that those from Judea were not acting upon the authority of the Apostles. They had acted upon their own thoughts and desires.
- C. They state that their decision for the Gentiles to have the same salvation as the Jews was first and foremost based upon the judgement of the Holy Spirit. This judgement of the Holy Spirit was determined based up the testimonies of the Apostles.

★ The way that this question of the Gentiles was answered, shouldn't surprise us because they determined God's will the exact same way we would determine the will of any person today. God's will was implied, shown, and told to them through their experiences. Doy Moyer, in discussing this topic of coming to know God's will through implication, example, and statement, says this to those who were disagree.

★ *"It is obvious that any attempt at communication will utilize one or more of those ways of communication. Try to communicate without it! I would issue this challenge if you disagree with what I'm saying: go ahead and disagree, but don't tell me anything about it, don't show me anything about it, and don't imply your disagreement. To do so would be self-defeating, for you will utilize the very process you are denying. Such cannot be done, and we would logically collapse on ourselves by thinking otherwise. Tell, show, and imply are logically self-evident. No further proof is needed, and objections to this are self-defeating and logically incoherent."* -Doy Moyer "It's How Communication Works" <http://www.mindyourfaith.com/the-authority-blog/its-how-communication-works>

How are we to know what God's will is for us as Christians and churches? The answer is to see what His Word shows, tells, and implies to us. Whether the question concerns salvation, morality, the work of the church, or anything the answers can be found through God showing, telling, or implying to us His will in all things. May God help us to be content with His will, and may we follow it in all that we do so that He will be glorified.